

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5691

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SF, AO, PINS, PFOR

SUBJ: REPORT ON SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA WAR

REFS: STATE 025296, CAPE TOWN 0155

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. SUMMARY: SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE BRIEFED PRESS
FEBRUARY 3 ON SOUTH AFRICAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA WAR.
STATING SOUTH FRICA INTERVENED AT REQUEST OF FNLF/UNITA
TO PREVENT COMMUNIST TAKEOVER, BRIEFING PROVIDED DETAILS
OF FIGHTING AND CONCLUDED WITH ASSERTION THAT, EXCEPT FOR
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SAVIMBA RESTRAINT AND DESIRE TO REACH NEGOTIATED SETTLE-
MENT, "ALLIED" FORCES COULD HAVE DEFEATED CUBANS COMPLETELY
AND CONQUERED ALL OF ANGOLA. THERE WAS NO MENTION OF
ANY US ROLE. END SUMMARY.

2. AT FEBRUARY 3 PRESS CONFERENCE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE
FORCE (SADF) REVEALED FOR FIRST TIME AND IN CONSIDERABLE

DETAIL ITS VERSION OF STORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA WAR. STORY WAS CARRIED AS LEAD IN VIRTUALLY ALL AFRIKAANS AND ENGLISH DAILIES. MAJOR POINTS FOLLOW.

3. SOUTH AFRICA ORIGINALLY BECAME INVOLVED BECAUSE "SOUTHERN ANGOLA WAS THRUST INTO A BLOODY STRUGGLE AND MISERY DIRECTLY BY THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION" TO GRANT INDEPENDENCE. "THE CHAOS AND CONFUSION WHICH REIGNED THERE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR SWAPO TERRORISTS TO FREELY CROSS THE BORDER, TO COMMIT MURDER AND TO DISAPPEAR AGAIN INTO THE CHAOTIC CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA." SAFETY OF RUACANA AND CALUEQUE HYDROELECTRIC SCHEMES WERE ALSO THREATENED. SADF FIRST MOVED IN "TO PROTECT THESE TWO SCHEMES AFTER THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO TAKE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE WORKERS". SADF WAS ALSO CROSSING BORDER "AT TIMES" IN HOT PURSUIT OF SWAPO. DURING ONE OF THESE OPERATIONS SADF UNCOVERED CUBAN AMMUNITION AND WEAPONS DUMPS. THIS CONFIRMED STORIES FROM "THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES" THAT CUBANS WERE ALREADY SUPPORTING THE MPLA, AND "PLACED THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA AND THE WATER SCHEMES IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT LIGHT."

RM INITIAL DIRECT SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY SUPPORT FOR FNLA/UNITA IN ANGOLA CAME AFTER APPEAL FROM TWO MOVEMENTS FOR AID IN STEMMING "COMMUNIST INFILTRATION". AT THIS POINT "COMMUNISTS" WERE ALREADY OCCUPYING TRADITIONAL UNITA AREAS IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA. BEFORE BECOMING DIRECTLY INVOLVED, SOUTH AFRICA HAD PROVIDED MILITARY TRAINING TO UNITA TROOPS. NO DETAILS GIVEN ON THIS EXCEPT STATEMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT SOUTH AFRICAN TRAINED UNITA FORCES WERE IN COMBAT INSIDE ANGOLA BY MID-OCTOBER 1975.

5. FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN SOLDIERS TO ENTER WAR WAS LIAISON OFFICER SENT TO SILVA PORTO ON SEPTEMBER 24 TO HELP PLAN OPERATION TO STOP MPLA MARCH ON NOVA LISBOA. HE WAS LATER JOINED BY "A TEAM OF 18 INSTRUCTORS WITH THREE ANTI-TANK WEAPONS AND A FEW MACHINE GUNS". ON OCTOBER 6 THESE MEN PARTICIPATED IN FIRST CLASH, WHICH SUCCEEDED IN HALTING MPLA ADVANCE.

6. THIRD PHASE BEGAN IN MID-OCTOBER WHEN SQUADRON OF SADF ARMORED CARS AND CREWS WERE SENT TO SILVA PORTO AND "FOXBAT" AND "ULU", FIRST OF FOUR BATTLE GROUPS, WERE FORMED. OBJECTIVE WAS RECAPTURE OF AS MUCH OF SOUTHERN ANGOLA AS POSSIBLE. ACCORDING TO SADF, BATTLE GROUPS HAD GREAT SUCCESS, AND WERE ABLE TO PUSH FORWARD WITH LITTLE RESISTANCE. BENGUELA AND LOBITO WERE CAPTURED BY NOVEMBER 7. CAMPAIGN SAW SOME HEAVY FIGHTING, AND MANY

EXAMPLES OF "CUBAN COWARDICE". AMONG COMMUNISTS KILLED WHEN A CUBAN GENERAL. SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY (FOUR 88 MM GUNS) WAS USED FOR FIRST TIME IN ATTACK ON NOVO REDONDO. FIERCE FIGHTING BEFORE CAPTURE OF TOWN ON NOVEMBER 13 SAW FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN KILLED IN ACTION. AS OF THIS TIME "ALLIES" CONTROLLED LINE FROM NOVO REDONDO TO LUSO AND WERE ABLE TO MOVE NORTH TO CUZANA RIVER, JUST SOUTH OF LUANDA, "WITH GREATEST OF EASE". AT THIS POINT FORCES STOPPED, HOPING FOR POLITICAL SOLUTION. SADF FORCES AT THIS STAGE COMPRISED "300 ADVISORS/INSTRUCTORS AND PERSONNEL AS WELL AS A LIMITED NUMBER OF ARMoured CARS, MORTARS AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONS."
BOWDLER

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7. HELP TO FNLA IN NORTH WAS VERY LIMITED. SADF ACTED ONLY "IN AN ADVISORY CAPACITY AT HOLDEN ROBERTO'S HEAD-QUARTERS AT AMBRIZ. SOUTH AFRICAN ADVISED ROBERTO TO CONCEN-TRATE ON HOLDING HIS OWN TERRITORY AND NOT LAUNCH OFFENSIVE;

INSTEAD HE ATTACKED LUANDA NOVEMBER 6. ACCORDING TO SADF:
"AS A RESULT OF THE FACT THAT NO SOUTH AFRICAN INSTRUCTORS
HAD ACCOMPANIED THIS FNLA FORCE, THE ATTACK....WAS A TOTAL
DISASTER. AGAINST THE ADVICE OF SOUTH AFRICA, ROBERTO
GAMBLED AWAY HIS FORCES ON CARELESS ATTACKS INSTEAD OF USING
THEM FOR THE RETENTION OF HIS TRADITIONAL AREA OF INFLUENCE."

8. FOLLOWING INDEPENDENCE, MILITARY ACTION INTENSIFIED.
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"CUBAN FORCES AND AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF RUSSIAN ARMAMENTS
STREAMED INTO ANGOLA DN COMPLETELY TOOK OVER THE MILITARY
FUNCTION FROM MPLA." NEED TO HOLD TERRITORY AGAINST
ONSLAUGHT LED TO SAF ESCALATION (TO 2,000 MEN AT HIGHEST
POINT), CREATION OF MORE BATTLE GROUPS, AND INTRODUCTION
OF 140 MM GUNS. BATTLE GROUP CAPTURED LUSO DECEMBER 11
IN EFFORT TO PROTECT BENGUELA RAILROAD. VICTORIES CON-
TINUED THROUGHOUT DECEMBER WITH NO SERIOUS SADF LOSS TO
CUBANS. EXCEPT FOR SMALL CONTINGENT TO PROTECT HYDRO-
ELCTRIC PROJECTS IN SOUTH, SADF WITHDREW FROM ANGOLA FOR
POLITICAL REASONS BY JANUARY 22, 1976. SADF CONCLUDED:
"THE ALLIED FNLA/UNITA FORCES SUPPORTED BY SOUTH AFRICAN
FORCE COULD HAVE CONQUERED THE WHOLE OF ANGOLA, BUT
DR. SAVIMBI INSISTED HE WAS ONLY INTERESTED IN CONTROL-
LING HIS TRADITIONAL AREA BECAUSE HE WAS DETERMINED TO
REACH A SETTLEMENT WITH THE MPLA TO THE ADVANTAGE OF
ANGOLA."

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9. COMMENT: RELEASE AT THIS TIME MAY BE INTENDED IN PART
TO REINFORCE PUBLIC FAITH IN DEFENCE FORCE IN PERIOD OF
INCREASING EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL THREAT TO SOUTH AFRICA AND
PROSPECT OF INCREASED DEFENCE BUDGET AND CALL-UPS.
ANOTHER OBJECTIVE SOULD BE TO COUNTER CUBAN VERSION RECENTLY
RELEASED. OF SPECIAL INTEREST IS FACT THATNO MENTION OF
U.S. ROLE IS MADE IN REPORT, WHICH STANDS IN MARKED
CONSTRAST TO STANCE TAKEN LAST YEAR. SAG UNOFFICIALLY PUT
OUT WORD THEN THAT U.S. HAD ENCOURAGED THEM TO
BECOME INVOLVED AND HAD LEFT THEM HOLDING THE BAG. SO FAR
EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED NO PRESS QUESTIONS ABOUT SAG OR USG
INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLAN WAR.
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